Tiny Dancer

An analysis on the song by Elton John

Context

This song was written by songwriting powerhouses Elton John and Bernie Taupin. The song's lyrics were heavily inspired by Taupin's trip to the US in 1970, where he met women who contrasted those who he knew in England. One of these women was Maxiene Feibelman, who would later turn out to become Taupin's wife. She was a ballet dancer when she was young and acted as a seamstress for Elton John's band.

Tiny Dancer

- **Released: 1971**
- **Album: Madman Across the Water**
- **Composed and performed by Elton John**
- **Lyrics by Bernie Taupin**

Instrumentation

The instrumentation of this song involves both typical and unusual for rock and pop songs of the time. These are:

- Vocals (Lead and backing)
- Drum kit
- Pedal steel guitar (commonly used in Hawaiian music).
- Strings
- Piano

Structure

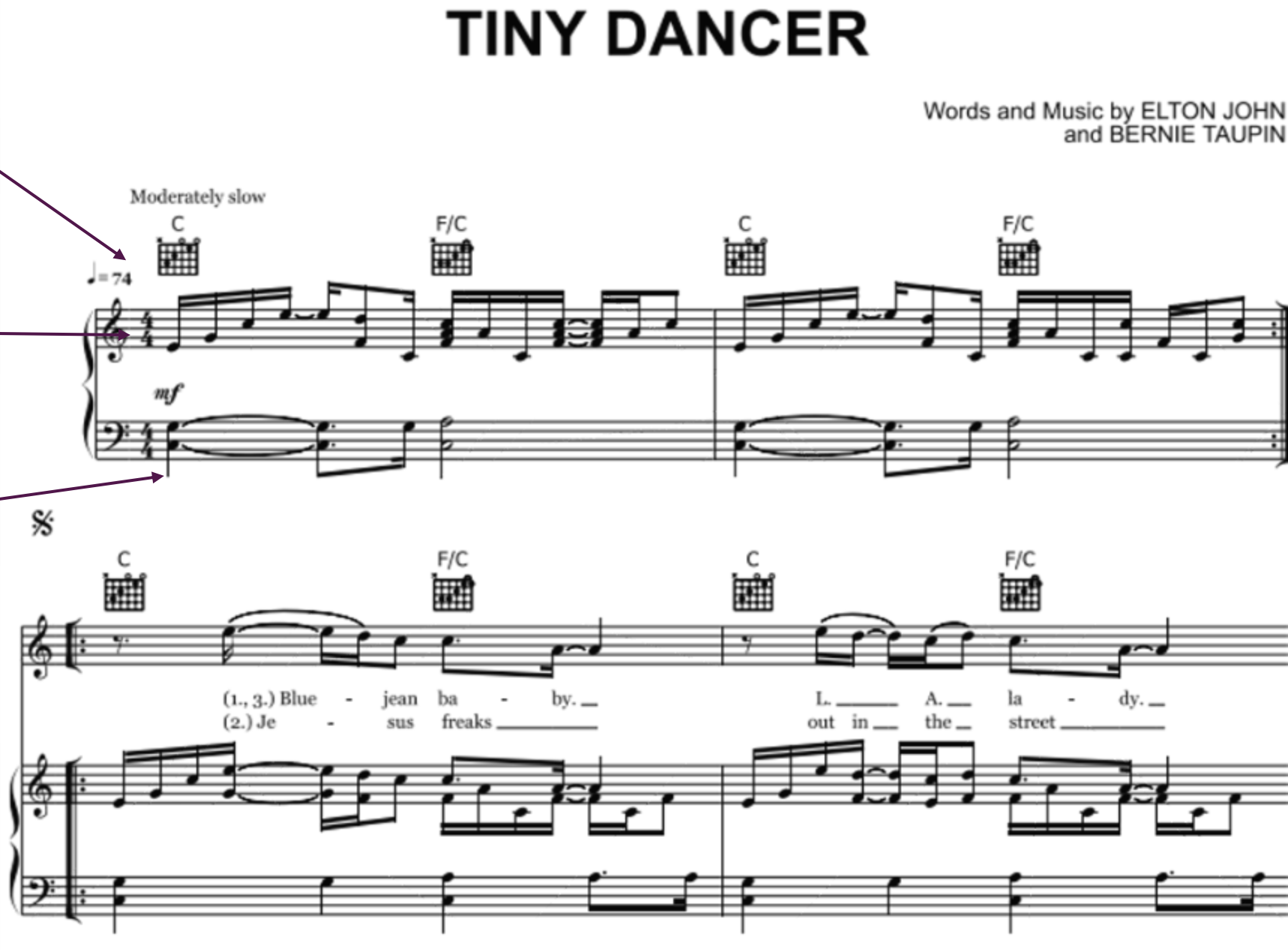
- Verse
- Verse
- Pre-chorus
- Chorus
- Verse
- Pre-chorus
- Chorus
- Outro

The Intro

The song begins with a 4-bar intro that repeats a 2-bar phrase. It switches between the **tonic** and the **subdominant** over a **C pedal** in the bass.

Song is in usual 4/4 metre.

This intro establishes the tonality as major by beginning on the C chord and having multiple plagal cadences. This tonality remains throughout the song.



The Verse(s)

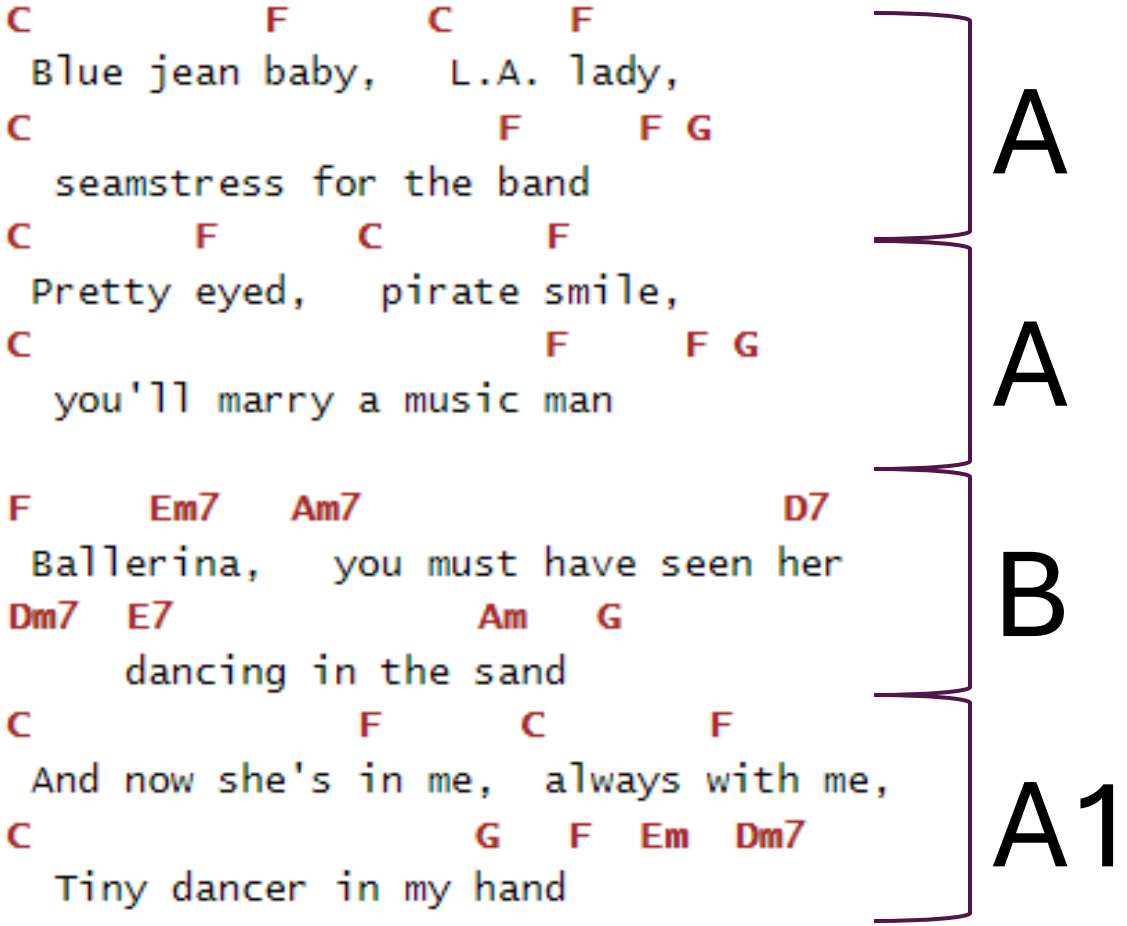
The verses are made up of eight 2 bar phrases
that make up a form of **A, A, B, A1**

The first 2 phrases (2 'A' sections) begin on the **tonic** (I) chord of the C major scale. The first phrase ends with a **plagal cadence** that is resolved in the next bar and the second phrase ends with a **perfect cadence** in a similar way.

The third phrase (B section) begins with the **subdominant** (IV) chord, which opposes the listeners expectations for the **tonic** chord to occur. Like the last one, this phase ends with a **perfect cadence.**

The final phase (A1 section) follows the same harmonic structure as the first 4 phrases, except it ends with a **turnaround,** to prepare the listen for a repeat of the verse.

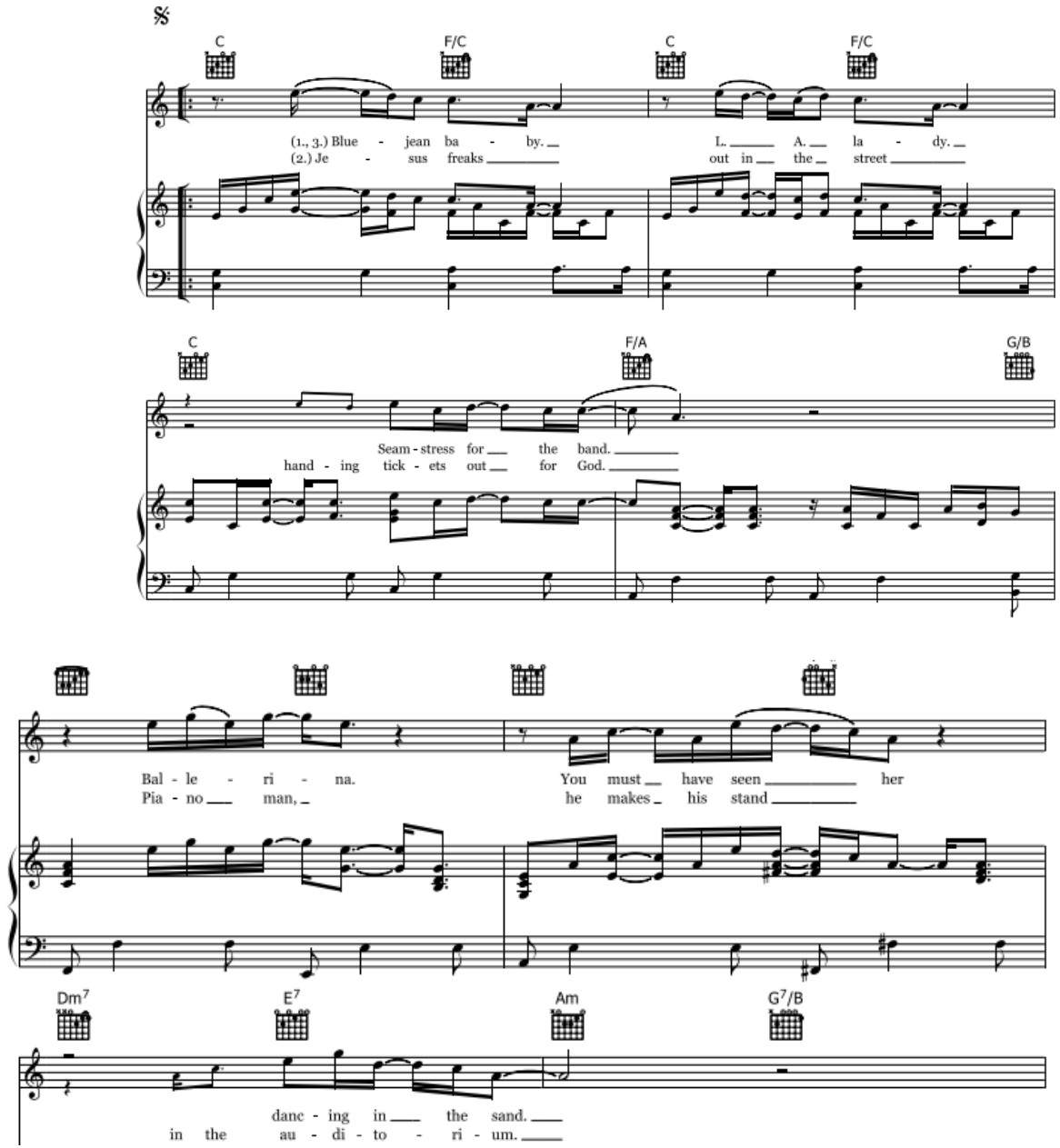
After this, the verse repeats with different lyrics, but still the same harmonic structure.



The Verse(s) - Melody

The first 2 'A' sections we discussed on the last slide follow a descending pattern that is repeated twice before a third pattern that first ascends and then descends. The patterns all move in conjunct intervals.

Then, the B section introduces more disjunct intervals before returning to a repeated A section, following the same conjunct, descending ideas.

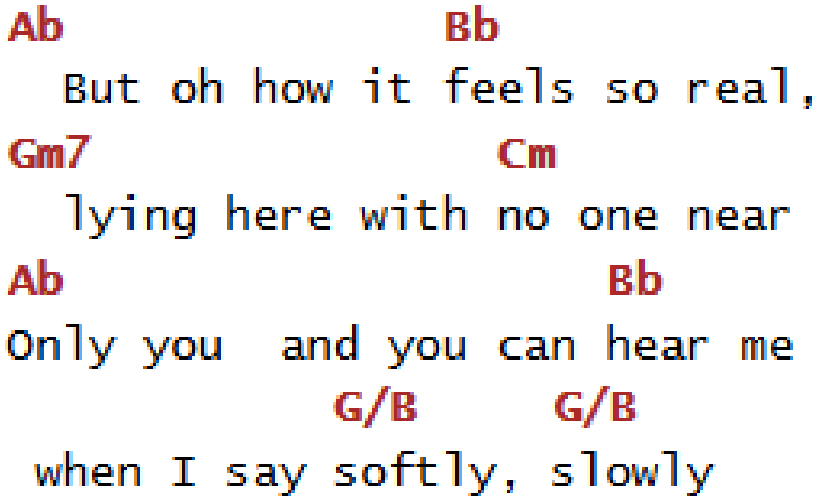


Pre-chorus

The verses are made up of 6 phrases, all one bar long

The pre-chorus begins by modulating from **C major** to **Ab major** via common tone modulation (The C major and Ab major chords both contain a C). The chord progression then moves diatonically though this new key with a march-like feel as the piano plays full chords on a **quaver beat**. This is until the end of the section where the it modulates back to the home key.

The melody contains more accidentals to stay diatonic within the new key. It moves diatonically, up and down the Ab major scale.



Common tone modulation – A change in key reinforced by a shared note between the tonic chord of the home key and the new key.

Chorus

The verses are made up of 6 phrases, all one bar long

The chorus begins with the modulation back to **C major**. The progression diatonically moves though the key, first ending on an **imperfect cadence** when the chorus repeats and ending on a **perfect cadence** the second time as there is another verse.

The melody in the chorus uses steps and leaps to create contrast, using an octave drop in the word 'closer' and a major 6th leap between the words "you had"

```
F         C            Dm        C
 Hold me closer tiny dancer
F           C                    G
 Count the headlights on the highway
F        C                   Dm
 Lay me down in sheets of linen
F           C           G
 You had a busy day today
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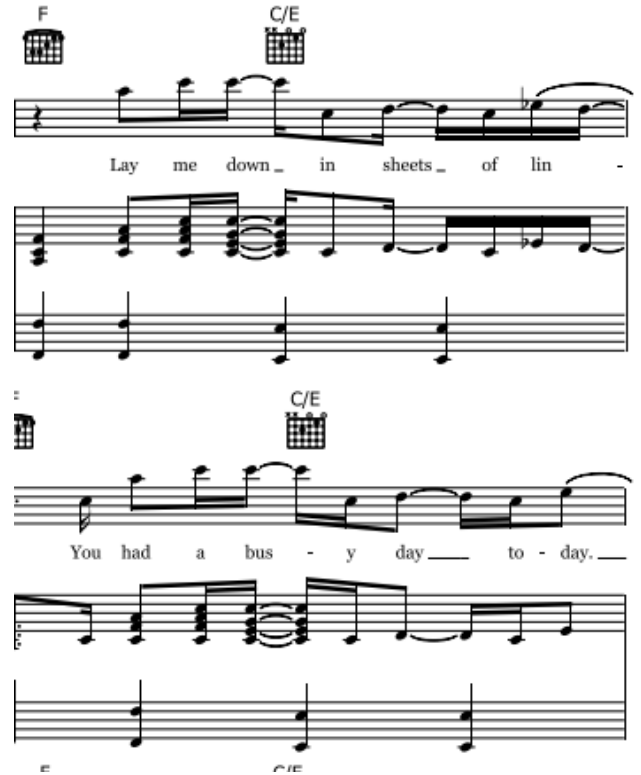
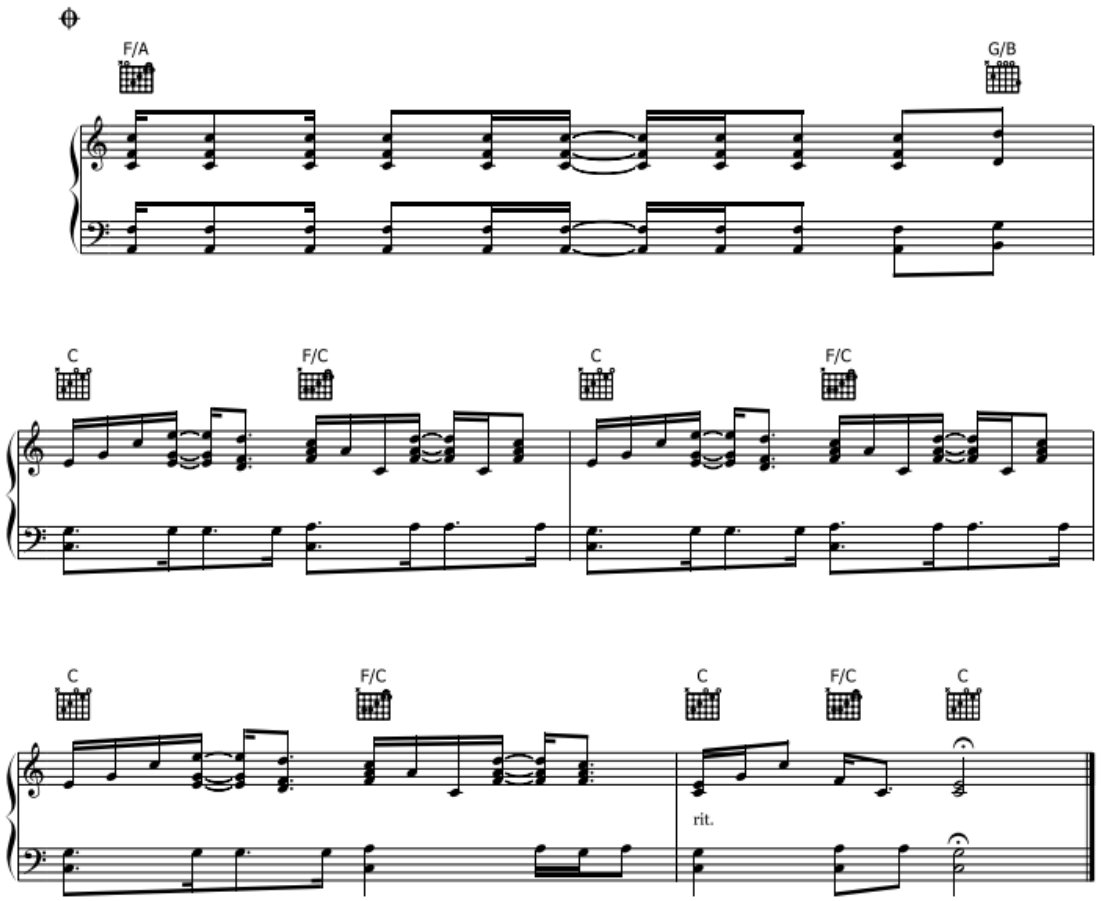


Outro

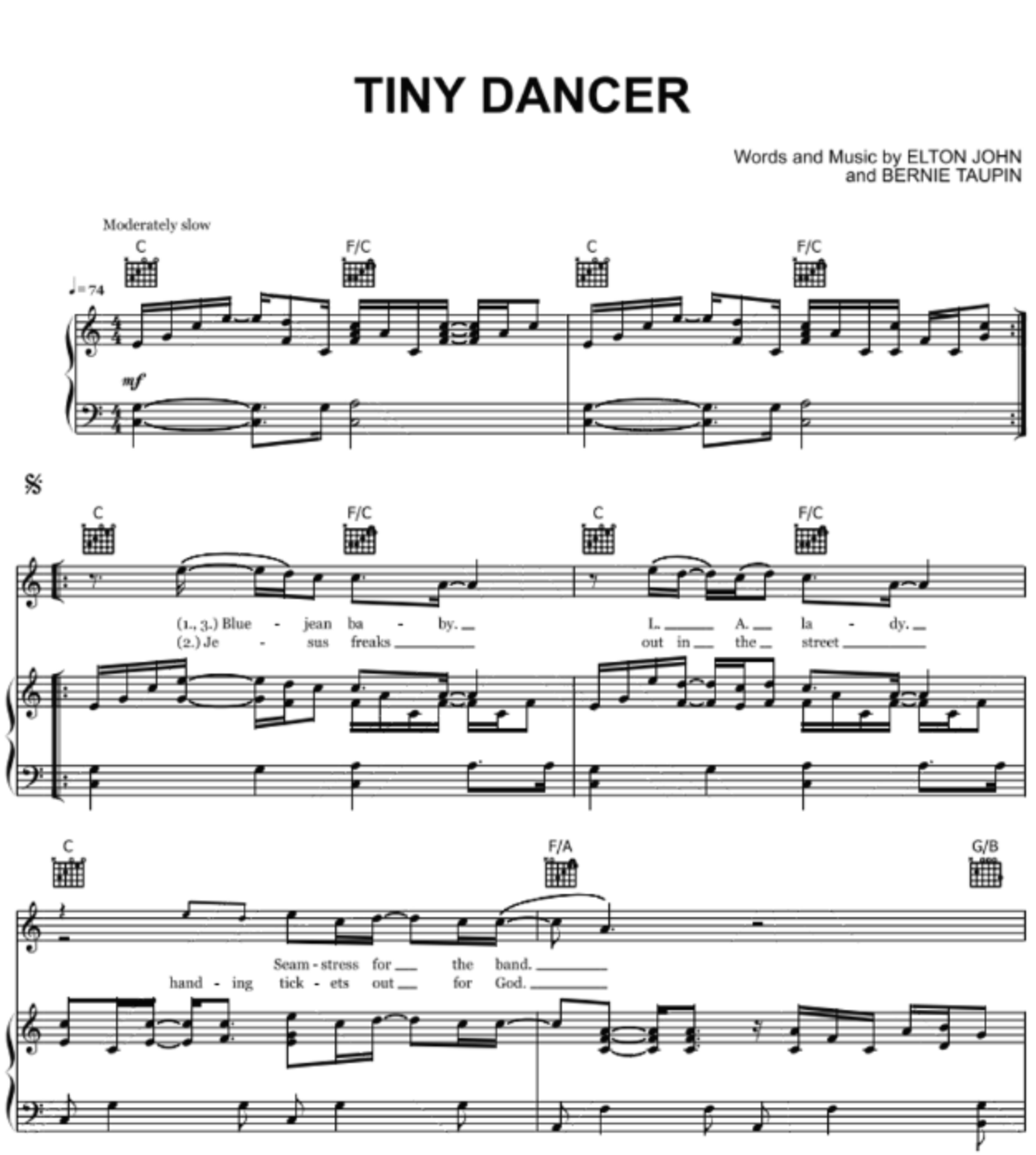
After a repeat of the verse, pre-chorus and chorus, the song ends with a short instrumental, made up of a **perfect cadence** and then 4 **plagal cadences** in succession. This subverts the listener's expectation for the song to end. Once it does ultimately end, there is a **fermata**, making it clear that this is the end



Fermata – A pause in the music where the note is held for longer than it is written, usually at the end of a section.

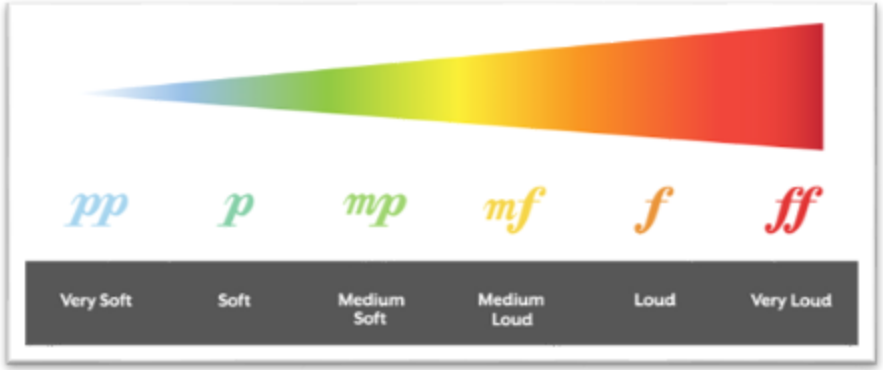
General Rhythm

This songs rhythm is full of variety, containing many dotted notes, ties, and note values as small as semiquavers. There is a clear **syncopated feel** throughout the piece that is contrasted during the pre-chorus.



Dynamics

Dynamically, this song is very straightforward, with a mezzo-forte (***mf***) mark at the beginning and remaining that way for the duration of the piece.



Conclusion

Tiny Dancer is hailed as a classic and is integral to the history of rock and pop. Its syncopated rhythm, classic structure and interesting choice of instrumentation makes it a song that people still sing along to this day.

Thank you for listening!

Sources

- https://eltonscafe.net/Songs/TinyDancer.htm
- https://www.e-chords.com/chords/elton-john/tiny-dancer
- https://sheetsfree.com/sheets/E/Elton%20John%20-%20Tiny%20Dancer.pdf